

VZCZCXYZ0006
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHPE #2860/01 2342246
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 222246Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY LIMA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6594
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION PRIORITY 1768
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 4993
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 7538
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 3062
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0698
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ AUG 4464
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 9273
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1404
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 1441
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL PRIORITY

UNCLAS LIMA 002860

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [XM](#) [XR](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: POSITIVE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO EARTHQUAKE SO FAR

REF: A. LIMA 2850

[1](#)B. LIMA 2849

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The Government's swift response to the August 15 earthquake, with President Garcia and several key ministers quickly taking charge on site in Ica, earned it early public kudos. Lapses in communication, security and effective victims' assistance have since eroded the image of competence and resolve somewhat. Inevitable rumblings about the President usurping the functions of local authorities have also begun, but these reflect a structural problem of relative capacity and not just Garcia's hope to shore up popular support. In our view, the central government should get good marks for its work thus far. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Government of Peru responded with commendable swiftness to the massive 8.0 earthquake that struck southern Peru on August 15 (ref A). Within hours of the event, following an emergency cabinet meeting, key ministers were dispatched to Pisco -- the epicenter of the quake some 150 miles south of Lima -- to assess the damage and to begin coordinating the government's operations. These included the Ministers of Health, Housing, Interior, Labor, Women's Affairs and Defense. By early August 16, buoyed by the outpouring of public sympathy and by widespread expressions of national unity, President Garcia himself arrived on site to take the reins of the government's operational and public response. Prime Minister Jorge del Castillo and President of Congress Luis Gonzales Posada (who represents Ica) were in tow. Before long, Garcia was presiding over informal cabinet meetings and holding press conferences in a makeshift operations center at an airbase on the outskirts of Pisco, the seaside city most dramatically impacted by the quake (ref A). Many observers praised the President for immediately recognizing the magnitude of the challenge and for proactively engaging the national government's machinery to respond to it.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In the intervening days, public focus has shifted from the government's immediate response to the series of obstacles that have undermined successful service delivery. In his initial public declaration, Garcia himself sharply criticized the quasi-national telephone company -- Spanish-owned Telefonica -- for the immediate and almost total collapse of land-line and cell phone communication networks, which have been non-existent to spotty in the Ica

region and parts of Lima ever since (ref B). Likewise, other services such as water and electricity remain unavailable in most of the directly affected areas. Security problems too surged several days after the quake, with reports of looters stopping supply trucks and of armed bandits robbing stores and terrorizing innocent civilians. The Government responded by sending in several hundreds of national police reinforcements, which appear to have helped restore order. Continuing reports of victims who have yet to receive assistance even days after the quake -- juxtaposed with news articles and TV images of the massive national and international assistance effort -- underscore the central challenge of coordination and follow-through, and have begun to undermine the government's image of competence and resolve.

14. (SBU) The inevitable critical rumblings about the President, cabinet ministers and other high profile political figures usurping the functions of the national Disaster Relief Agency (INDECI) and of regional and local authorities, and thereby compromising the relief effort, have also begun. While a politician of President Garcia's caliber is unlikely to miss the political opportunity latent in a crisis of this kind, this only partly explains his high-profile participation in the government's response up to now. For one, the relative incapacity of regional and local governments, many of which lack the resources or capabilities to marshal any response at all, is a real problem. The early reaction of several key local authorities is illustrative. According to an Embassy officer who was on the scene August 16, one local mayor who had lost a family member in the devastation fell into a listless despondency, while another assumed an attitude of passive waiting for what Garcia and the central government decided to do. In this kind of leadership and basic capacity vacuum, the government probably had no choice but to jump in full bore. Garcia's unmatched energy, his desire to be at the center of the action, and his keen attention to detail were precisely what Peru needed at the time.

Comment: Effective Response So Far

15. (SBU) If the early challenge was to shine a political and public spotlight on the scope of the problem in order to ensure an adequate response, the President has performed admirably well. In an environment in which the government would probably be damned either way, an excessively strong response has been preferable to an insufficiently robust one, and in that sense the Garcia administration should get high marks. Strong public support for the government's actions and a slight boost in the President's informal poll numbers lend early support to that perception. Second-phase challenges, particularly the onerous, low-visibility task of coordination to ensure that the considerable resources gathered get to their intended beneficiaries, are of a different order. Already, the GOP has assigned responsibility for certain tasks and certain areas to specific ministries, and stood up at least 13 service delivery centers to facilitate the flow of services. Over the mid to long-term, however, these tasks will probably require a quiet hand-off to INDECI and to those local authorities that are capable of taking up the slack. Indications are this is underway.

McKinley